



A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF
REVELATION



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Today's Goals

Discuss some major schools of thought around the interpretation of Revelation.

- Equip our study for this year
- Explore some new points of view
- Establish why it matters

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How important is it to “have a view” on Revelation? Why or why not?

“Having a View”

Two extremes to avoid:

-
-

“Having a View”

Two extremes to avoid:

- Fanaticism
-

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- Indifference

“Having a View”

Two extremes to avoid:

- Fanaticism
- Indifference

We don't need to be fanatical, but we should be *invested* and *thoughtful*.

Interpretation Questions

- When do the events of Revelation primarily take place?
- Is Revelation in chronological order?
- How literal is *too* literal a reading of Revelation?
- How symbolic is *too* symbolic?
- How are we supposed to apply Revelation to our lives?

Interpretation Questions

We don't have to have all the answers to all these questions, but:

- We are going to have to think about them as we read
- Many different views on Revelation hinge around them

Today's Topics

Interpretive Schools

- Futurist, preterist, historicist, idealist

Millennial Views

- Premillennial, postmillennial, amillennial

Interpretive Schools of Revelation (and more...)

Interpretive School	Basic Approach to Revelation
Preterist	Believe that the events of Revelation were fulfilled beginning in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.
Historicist	View the book of Revelation as an overview of church history, describing various times of persecution and tribulation.
Idealist	Interpret Revelation symbolically, as a non-literal depiction of the battle between God and the satanic forces of evil.
Futurist	View Revelation 4-22 as a prophetic account of actual future events, specifically focused on the end of this age.

Futurist Interpretation

- Revelation is primarily fulfilled in the future, particularly the eschatological future.
- Forms of this view embraced throughout church history, but its modern form is a few hundred years old (Francisco Ribera, John Nelson Darby)
- Very common view today

Futurist Interpretation

- Why hold this view?
 - Language of prophecy is futurist
 - Finality of many descriptions (ex. 21:3-4)
 - Lack of fulfillment so far in history
 - Enables a more literal reading

Futurist Interpretation

- Why not hold this view?
 - Perhaps too literal a reading
 - Can halt interpretation
 - Limited relevance for original audience
 - Difficulty with “soon”

Preterist Interpretation

- Revelation is primarily fulfilled in the first century AD, typically by events leading up to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.
- Can be a *full preterist* (rare) or a *partial preterist* (more common)
- Similar origins to modern futurism (Luis de Alcazar)

Preterist Interpretation

- Why hold this view?
 - Direct and urgent application to 1st cent. audience
 - Certain descriptions seem to fit nicely
 - Potential relevance to some of Jesus' prophecy (ex. Olivet discourse, weeping over Jerusalem)

Preterist Interpretation

- Why not hold this view?
 - Relies on early dating of the book
 - Limited relevance for later Christians
 - Does not fit all descriptions so naturally
 - Hard to maintain in full

Historicist Interpretation

- Revelation is primarily fulfilled gradually over the whole age
- Various expositions throughout history, but gains major ground during the Protestant Reformation
 - Pope/papacy as the Antichrist
 - Fall of the Roman Empire
 - Day-year interpretation
- Less common today apart from certain groups (SDA, JW)

Historicist Interpretation

- Why hold this view?
 - Spiritual backdrop to all of history
 - Can match some descriptions quite well (e.g. fall of Roman Empire)
 - Connects 1st-century fulfillment to eschatological fulfillments
 - Great if you don't like the Pope

Historicist Interpretation

- Why not hold this view?
 - Too many options
 - Tends to age like milk
 - Limited relevance for immediate audience (like futurism)

Idealist Interpretation

- Revelation does not have one single historical fulfillment, but describes enduring truths about God's sovereignty, good and evil, and Christian life.
- Long history of symbolic interpretations in the church, in a variety of forms
- Has become popular in scholarship over the last couple of centuries (for better or worse)

Idealist Interpretation

- Why hold this view?
 - Explores rich symbolism in Revelation
 - Overlaps with other moral and spiritual teaching in Scripture
 - Relevant to all audiences

Idealist Interpretation

- Why not hold this view?
 - Too symbolic?
 - Departs from the urgency and predictive tone of the text
 - Associations with liberal scholarship

Overall Thoughts

Out of those options, this is the correct view:
(DRUM ROLL)

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I don't know. :)

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Out of those options, this is the correct view:
I don't know. :)

- Not forced to take a single view
 - Passage by passage approach
 - Many views borrow from each other (futurist view of last chapters, idealist applications of particular fulfillments)

Overall Thoughts

All of these views probably have something to say to our interpretation of prophecy.

- We can look back on how God has preserved His people in the past.
- God continues to be sovereign over history.
- We look forward in eager expectation of the consummation of all things.
- God's work in the world teaches us enduring truths.

Millennial Views

Question: “When does Christ return relative to the Millennium?”

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Millennial Views

- Premillennialism
 - Historic
 - Dispensationalist
- Postmillennialism
- Amillennialism

Premillennialism

- Christ returns before (i.e. “pre”) the Millennium
- At a certain point in the future, Jesus comes for His people, and an extended period (often literal 1000 yrs) of peace and righteousness ensues
- Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Isaac Newton, Charles Spurgeon, George Eldon Ladd, John Darby, D.A. Carson, John Piper, etc.

Premillennialism

Often split into two camps:

- Historic
 - More in line with the views of many church fathers (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, etc)
 - Tends to lean post-tribulation
- Dispensational
 - More recent – John Nelson Darby, 19th century
 - Tends to lean pre-tribulation, strong emphasis on the distinction between Israel and the church

Premillennialism

Impact:

- More likely to be pessimistic about world affairs
- Pre- vs post-tribulation: How much will God let us suffer?

Postmillennialism

- Christ returns after (i.e. “post”) the Millennium
- Extended period of peace and righteousness comes about through the preaching of the Gospel to the nations, gradual Christianization of the world
- Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, R.J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Doug Wilson

Postmillennialism

- Popular among Puritan theologians during the Great Awakening
- Repopularized in the past few decades by Rushdoony, often associated with Christian Reconstructionism

Postmillennialism

Impact:

- More likely to be optimistic about world affairs
- Eschatological importance of the Great Commission

Amillennialism

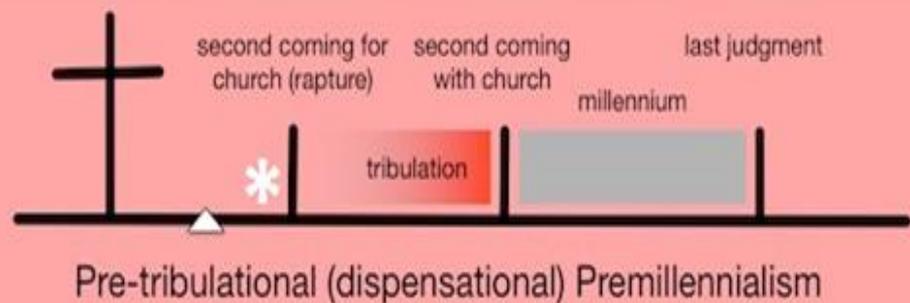
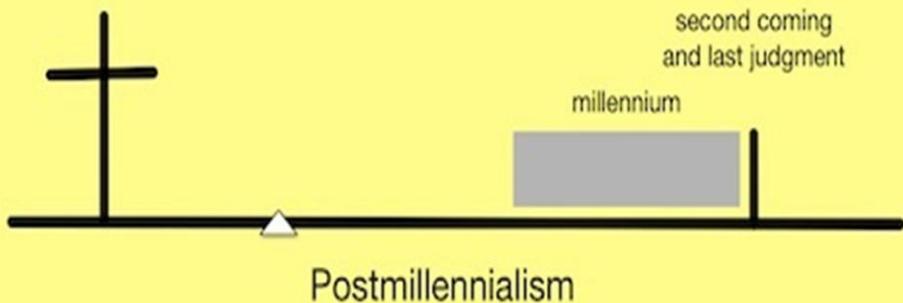
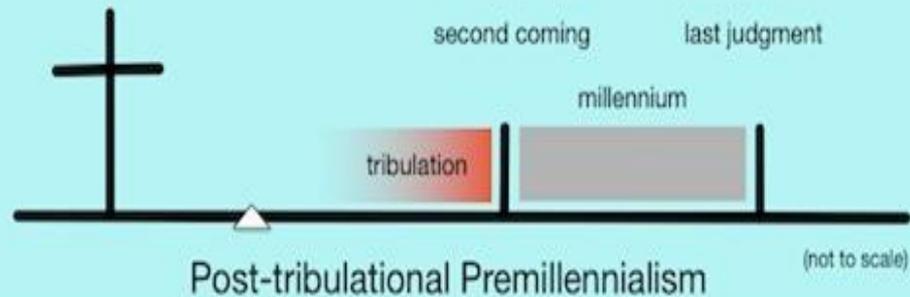
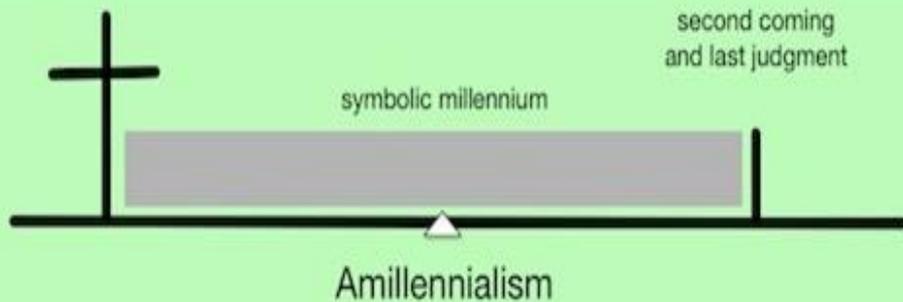
- Millennium is not an earthly reign, but represents the spiritual reign of Christ in heaven (1000 years symbolic of extended time period)
- Inaugurated by Jesus defeating sin and death on the cross, now shared by believers who overcome with Christ
- Augustine, Origen, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Philip Melancthon, Abraham Kuyper, Geerhardus Vos, J.I. Packer, the Roman Catholic Church

Amillennialism

Impact:

- Emphasis placed on spiritual reality, regardless of how earthly events unfold (for better or for worse)
- More emphasis on the second coming as the primary bookend of the age

Summary



Four Views of the End Times

	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historical Premillennialism	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
Will Jesus return physically?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
When will Jesus return?	After a 7-year tribulation; before the millennium.	After tribulation; before the millennium.	Anytime; a detailed time frame is not important.	After the millennium.
Do the rapture and second coming of Christ occur at the same time?	No, they are events separated by either 7 years (pre-tribulation rapture) or 3½ years (mid-tribulation rapture).	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Dispensational Premillennialism	Historical Premillennialism	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism
Will Christians suffer during the tribulation?	Christians are either raptured before the tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture) or 3½ years into the tribulation (mid-tribulation rapture).	Yes, Christians will go through the tribulation and endure suffering and persecution for the cause of Christ.	Yes, Christians will suffer and endure persecution until Jesus returns; persecution will increase in the end.	Yes, Christians are called to share the gospel, and tribulation will occur when that gospel is opposed.
Will there be a literal 1,000-year millennium?	Yes, after the 7-year tribulation, Christ will return and reign for 1,000 years.	Yes, after the tribulation, Christ will return and reign for 1,000 years.	No, the millennium refers to the reign of Christ in the hearts of his believers.	No , the millennium refers to a period of peace when the gospel reaches all people.
Who is saved?	Christians only	Christians only	Christians only	Christians only
Is the modern state of Israel relevant to the prophecies in Revelation?	Yes	No	No	No

Concluding Thoughts

- Reading Revelation is going to confront us with some difficult questions, and very intelligent and faithful believers have given differing answers to these questions.
- We do not have to have this figured out in order for Revelation to teach and bless us.
- But... let's be fans of this book!